

JOHN 7

JESUS, THE WATER OF LIFE

While weighing the evidence for the Deity of Christ, as it is presented by John, we should not fail to include the Divine knowledge of the future, which our Lord was shown to possess (verses 1-13). He knew beforehand the exact time and nature of His death, and He frequently referred to His “hour” which was to come. It is this fact which explains the conversation between Jesus and His brothers shortly before the Feast of Tabernacles. For some time now, He had continued His ministry in the region of Galilee. But as this great national festival approached, His brothers urged Him to go again to Jerusalem and declare boldly and publicly that He was the true Messiah. At this time, His brethren had no real faith in Him. But they wished to have His claims tested; and if they were true, they desired for Him to receive national recognition. “Jesus therefore saith unto them, My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil.” Nevertheless, after His brethren had left home and begun traveling to Jerusalem for the feast, then He went also – not publicly, however; but secretly. There was no deception nor inconsistency here on the part of Jesus, for He knew that the time had not yet come for His final public manifestation to Israel. It was not at a Feast of Tabernacles that He was to die, but at the time of a Passover celebration; for He was to be the sacrificial Lamb, Who would take away the sin of the world. His earthly ministry was not yet finished; the hour for His final tragedy and triumph had not yet struck. This is what He meant when He said that His time was “not yet come.” He would indeed go to the feast, but not in the manner and for the purpose that was suggested by His brethren.

The relatives of Jesus, however, are not the only ones who are concerned about His attendance at the feast. By this time, He has become a character of national interest. His claims cannot be disregarded. The rulers are watching for His appearance, and the multitudes are divided in their opinions of Him – some declaring him to be a “good man,” and others believing that “he leadeth the multitude astray.” In the same way, people today are compelled to face the claims of Jesus Christ. They cannot be put aside, for they sustain a vital and personal relationship to every immortal soul. There can be only two possible judgments passed upon Jesus: either He was a good Man or an impostor. But He could not have been truly “good” unless He was indeed the Divine Son of God – for that is what He claimed to be, and no “good person” can be a liar.

During the Feast, Jesus appears and teaches publicly in the Temple (verses 14-36). He made it clear to His hearers that those who reject His claims are pro-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *Christ's attendance at the Feast of Tabernacles – verses 1-13*
- ❖ *His discourse with the Jews during the Feast – verses 14-39*
- ❖ *The people and the rulers dispute concerning Christ – verses 40-53*

nouncing a terrible judgment upon themselves. The rulers wonder at the depth of meaning which is being drawn from the Scriptures by Jesus – a Man Who has never attended any of the rabbis' schools. But He replies by telling them, "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself." In other words, since His teaching and claims are of Divine origin, they will be accepted as such by all who are in sympathy with the Divine will. Faith is more of a moral than an intellectual matter; it is more a question of spiritual sympathy, rather than of external evidence. One who is eager to do the will of God cannot fail to yield himself to the Son of God, when He has been clearly revealed in all His matchless holiness and grace.

Jesus then proceeds to defend His conduct. The only charge that had ever been levelled against Him is that of breaking the Sabbath, in His cure of the sick man at Bethesda. He replies by showing that the Mosaic legislation itself (which these rulers were claiming to uphold) justified this supposed breach of the law. He shows them that it allowed to be performed, upon the Sabbath, a ceremonial ritual that is symbolic of holiness; can it be wrong, then, that Jesus "made a man every whit whole on the sabbath"? He warns the Jews against such foolish and superficial judgments, but it is also to be noted that He here makes a specific claim of sinlessness. In the history of the world, has any other man, woman, or child ever been able to successfully defend such a claim?

As the multitudes begin to question whether Jesus is really the Messiah, they are puzzled by the fact that they know His parents, hometown, and early life; whereas the coming of the Messiah, according to their thoughts, was to be shrouded in mystery. But Jesus publicly and solemnly declares that the knowledge which they possess is only superficial; His true origin is from God and from heaven, and that is the place to which He would soon return. He was to go away, and they would not be able to find Him. Little did they understand His words, which seem so clear to us as we read them; but do they contain no serious message for us? Is it not true that many persons reject the Savior upon some such trivial and superficial reasoning as that which these people produced? They "know" this or that, and they have also conjectured some other things – but what did Jesus *really* do and say? What was His life, and what were His claims? It is only for "a little while" that we have an opportunity to accept Him, for time is fleeting. Will we be one of those who will have nothing except regrets and remorse after the time for believing in Him has come and gone? Or will we seize the blessed opportunity – now and today! – to believe in and follow Him?

On the last day of the feast, Jesus made His supreme claim; He gave the climax of His teaching about that spiritual life which would result from faith in Him (verses 37-52). He declared that He fulfilled, in His own Person, all the great realities that were merely symbolized by this Jewish feast; and He said that His followers would experience all the lasting blessedness and joy that was rep-

resented by the festivities of the national celebration. The “tabernacles,” or temporary dwelling-places which gave this particular feast its name, commemorated the wilderness-life of ancient Israel after the Exodus from Egyptian slavery; and since it occurred about the time of the harvest, it also celebrated the goodness of God. The people spent the week of this feast camping out in booths, as their forefathers had done in the desert hundreds of years before; and the chief ceremonies that were observed on these eight days called to mind the miraculous blessings of Israel’s pilgrim-journey. Every morning during the feast, a ceremonial pouring out of water was made in the Temple; and it called to mind the water which the Lord had miraculously brought forth from the split rock. This water was brought in a golden pitcher from the pool of Siloam, and it was emptied out in the Temple amidst the sounding of trumpets and the shouting of the rejoicing multitudes.

Surely in those multitudes that were assembled at this time in the holy city, Jesus saw a representation of the countless souls which have been making their pilgrimages through all ages and lands – thirsting, fainting, and distressed! They were in His mind when He stood and cried out, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water!” Jesus was claiming that

for all the weary, unsatisfied, and thirsty world, He was to be the equivalent of what the split rock had been for the Israelites of old! No greater claim could be made, nor could it be made under more impressive circumstances. Yet Jesus adds a promise of the blessedness which would belong to His followers, and this was even more marvelous than any promise which had hitherto fallen from His lips. Those who are satisfied by Him become sources of spiritual blessing themselves; they are developed into channels of spiritual life, which gush forth to provide life-giving water to even more souls. His truth, His grace, and His saving power flow through them, for the saving and satisfying of others. Their influence is not meager and restricted, but it is like “rivers of



living water.” The fulfillment of this promise, however, would not be until Jesus had been “glorified” in death, resurrection, and ascension. Then, when He had been revealed in His true character as the Divine Son of God and the Savior of the world – then His Spirit would come in Pentecostal power upon all who put their trust in Him!

Such claims and promises as these which Jesus uttered were received in various manners – just as they still are today. The testimony which the Scriptures give of the Divine Person of Christ, and of promises of new life to His followers, produces contrasted effects in different persons. This chapter opened with a statement of the unbelief of the persons who had grown up with Jesus in their own family circle; and now we read that after Christ’s matchless promise of “living water,” there was a division in the multitude because of Him. Yet the most striking contrast is that with which the chapter closes. Officers were sent to arrest Jesus; but they are obliged to return to the waiting council of rulers, confessing that “never man so spake!” The Pharisees rebuke them in bitter scorn, and asserted that only hopeless ignorance can accept the claims of Christ. But one of their own council members – Nicodemus, the same man who had previously come to Jesus by night – now speaks up. He reminds them that their law – for ignorance of which, they are despising the common people – rebukes them for condemning Jesus without even granting Him a just hearing. Nicodemus’ defense of Jesus on this occasion was an evidence of his growing faith. Even though he is a man of timid temperament, he is seeking the truth; and before this Gospel-narrative is over, we shall find him to be a true disciple indeed – bringing his precious spices to the tomb, in order to show his devotion to the Lord Whom he really did love!

In many instances, even today, large numbers of people hear Jesus willingly. In hearts where there is no pride of intellect – there His words are welcomed, and there His promises are gladly received. The enemies of Christ, on the other hand, often act without reason toward Him. They seldom allow His Word to fairly present His claims. They have a great knowledge of law and human wisdom, but they do not honestly face His words and works.

Lord Jesus, we confess that our spiritual condition, by nature, is like that of the hopeless persons described in the beginning of Psalm 107 – lost, perishing, homeless, hungry, and thirsty. But we rejoice that You have satisfied our thirsty souls with Your water of life! Thank You for Your amazing love, which has made plenteous provision of the life-giving stream to quench our souls’ thirst. And since we have received Your fullness, help us to also pass on that fullness to the drought-smitten world around us. Amen.